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Children of the Resurrection

BY

JOHN WATSON, D.D.
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PREFATORY NOTE

Some years ago preliminary arrangements were transacted for the publication of this book in America, but for some reason, of which I am ignorant, the final closure was postponed, and the author's death in 1907 left the matter unsettled.

It is at my mother's desire, and through the courtesy of the proprietors of the *Sunday Magazine*, that these studies are now published in book form.

FREDERICK WATSON.

London,
February 1912.

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Four Faithful Women

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I

FOUR FAITHFUL WOMEN

When Jesus rested from His labour and His body slept in Joseph's tomb, it was the darkest day in the history of the Church. The Master had done His best to prepare the disciples for this trial, assuring them long before that His death was inevitable and that His resurrection was sure. But His words failed of their meaning; because He was yet present with them, His

friends could not imagine His departure. His prophecy had been only too sadly fulfilled, and it might have been expected that, if the unbelief of the disciples about the Lord's death had been overcome by the cruelty of facts, their unbelief regarding the Lord's resurrection would have yielded to the evidence of hope; but they were so stunned by their loss that, although they were now compelled to believe the Lord's word in the present, they had not yet strength to believe His word for the future. They were convinced that they would never again see their lost Lord, save it be in the resurrection of the just, and their faith,

which was that of personal devotion, was buried with Jesus in His garden grave.

They gathered, as we imagine, on that dreary Sabbath, in the upper room, which was full of sacred memories, and behaved themselves as other mourners have done in the same circumstances at all times. For the years come and go, but sorrow does not change, and the heart's bitterness in the East is not different from that in the West. That company of mourners, for whom the funeral was over, would sit in silence broken only by the weeping of the women, whom the men could not com-

fort, because they had no comfort themselves.

Certain were absent from the gathering for reasons which every one understood. John had taken the mother of Jesus home yesterday afternoon, and she hid her grief in seclusion, while the friend of Jesus remained with her to share her grief and do what he could to support her broken heart. Thomas was absent, not because he did not love, but because he loved so much, and saw no good in talk when hope was dead; and Peter was not there, because he could not look his brethren in the face after he had denied his Lord.

By and by some one would

break the silence by recalling the life of the last three years, and then another would follow, till each mourner had contributed some work or word of the Lord's. And each reminiscence would feed the springs of sorrow. How the Master had called upon a young maiden just dead, and she had answered His voice, so that weeping and wailing changed into joy and peace in the ruler's house; but there was no one here to wipe away their tears, or fill the upper room with light. How He had pity upon a widow's heart, and restored to her a son whom death had taken as his spoil; but there was no power to give back to the most bereaved

mother the kindest of all sons. How He Himself had missed His friend Lazarus, and commanded him to return from his rocky tomb, and Lazarus came, because death was not able to separate the friends; but none of them, though they were all His friends, could make their Master hear in Joseph's tomb. Three years of perfect fellowship, such as before had never been given to unworthy men, and never could be given again, and now their day of grace and brightness was forever over, and for them there remained nothing but the memory of perfect goodness without the shadow of a fault. Theirs was an incalculable and

irreparable loss, and yet, so fond a thing is the human heart, none of this company, not even Thomas himself, would have wished the three years blotted out, but every one would count them the chief treasure of his heart.

Four faithful souls had not yet done with Jesus, for, though they did not expect to see Him again, His dust was precious to them, and they had still certain last offices of kindness to render. When the body was laid in the tomb, they marked the spot, and it was their intention when the Sabbath closed and the day had broken to enrich with spices the tabernacle from which the

Lord had fled. One was Mary Magdalene, and another was Mary the mother of James, and a third was Salome, John's mother, and the fourth was Joanna, a lady of Herod's court. Between them all there had been a conspiracy that without the help of any one, and in spite of any hindrance, they should accomplish their last service to the Lord. They had gathered in Salome's house; but no one must know, not even Mary the mother of Jesus, who had suffered enough, nor John, who might not have allowed them to go on such an errand. They were cunning in their love, and a woman can ever outwit a man when love is her guide;

and they would do this thing by themselves, and none should know till it was done.

Through the night they waited and watched for the day, and it seemed as if night had never been so long; and, when hour followed hour with leaden feet, and still there was no sign of morning, the four lost patience. They read a common resolution in one another's faces, and like a thief they quietly stole from the house. Through the night which is darkest before the dawn, and through the silent city which seemed as if it were dead, they made their way with cautious step but steadfast hearts to Joseph's garden. Was there

ever such an instance of women's unreasoning and unguarded love? Why could they not wait? It would only be an hour or so more, and then the sun had risen. Had they forgotten the dangers of the city to four women in the darkness? and what availed their going to the sepulchre, with that great stone lying upon its mouth? Could women's hands or women's love remove that stone? Sensible questions and unanswerable, but they are out of place this morning, for the women have obeyed the imperious instinct of their hearts, and the issue is with God.

Very early had they arisen,

but their Lord had risen earlier; for, while they were watching with weary hearts for the day which seemed never likely to break, He had folded up His grave-clothes and laid them aside, and had come forth as the Sun of Righteousness, before whom death and darkness fled. When the four reached the garden, the day was breaking with shimmering light, and to their amazement the sepulchre of the Lord was empty. They had wondered who should roll away the stone, but there was no stone to hinder their entrance; they had an uncovenanted tryst with Christ, but, behold, He had been faithless once at least, and had not

kept it; they had spices with them which were not so fragrant as His love, but now they were vain and useless.

Yet their Master had not forgotten them, but, expecting this early visit, had left two of His heavenly friends, the holy angels, to give a message to His earthly friends and to bid them be of good cheer. 'Why seek ye the living among the dead?' said the shining ones, with kindly rebuke filled to the brim with consolation. 'He is not here, but is risen.' And the angels commanded the women in the Lord's name to return to the disciples and to assure them of the resurrection. They had watched

for the Lord, though it was only for His body, as those that watch for the morning, and the morning had come with the angels and words of gladness.

Through the streets they hurried, which were now full of soft morning light, and on every side the city was awakening to light, and they imagined the joy of their coming into the upper room, where the disciples would again be gathered, and the effect of their message. What the angels had been to them they would be to their friends.

Alas for a woman's emotion! alas for a man's hard common

sense! When they burst into the room with the new spirit of the resurrection, the disciples stared at them, and the very look was a rebuke. As they told their tale of an empty tomb —they had seen no Lord—one disciple would look at another and raise his eyebrows, and the other would shake his head, and both were sure that they understood the situation. Those good women! They had been watching all night—women will do such things; apostles had slept, even in Gethsemane. They had been weeping till their eyes were nearly blind—'tis a woman's way, for God has made them so, not calm and self-restrained like

men. Then they went on their wild journey—was there no man there to prevent them? And through their tears and in the uncertain morning light they supposed that they had seen angels and heard voices. Those good women! For a moment the disciples almost expected that the women had some good news to tell, but now any one could understand how it all happened. No one would be so cruel as to accuse them of falsehood, none so ungenerous as flatly to deny their message; but, as the women looked round on the faces of their friends, they knew that they had only told to them an idle tale, and their enthusiasm

broke like spray upon the calm, cold front of a man's solid reason.

Mary Magdalene was more fortunate than her fellows, as she was that day to be more honoured by her Lord, for, while the others went with their message to the general company of disciples, she was sent on an errand of her own to John and Peter. The devotion of the one and the energy of the other gave Mary a better audience, and she had no sooner told her story than the two apostles flung themselves out of their home, and started on a race of love to verify the rising of the Lord. John was the quieter man, to whom all haste

and display were alien; but love gave wings to his feet that day, and the city through which he passed was unseen and forgotten.

When he arrived at the empty tomb, he did not enter, because to him the place where the Lord had lain was sacred. But when Peter, whom he had for once outdistanced in his haste, stood beside him, he did not hesitate, but entered in and made certain that the Lord had risen. So there were two men at least who shared the women's faith, and did not count their message to be foolishness, and there will always be men who, through either the purity of their hearts or the warmth of their affections,

will sympathise with the spiritual instincts of women, and will share the blessing that rests upon women's spiritual love.

Who were wiser that day, the men with their shrewdness and their slowness to believe, or the women with their unworldly mind and their fond hearts? Can nothing happen which has not happened before, and is past experience the limit of the Almighty? Is there nothing except that which is seen, and no power in reserve which we have not tested? Is not life greater than death, and the unseen world encompassing us on every side? And is there not a blessing which hath not

entered into the heart of man, ready for those who believe because they love, and are ready to serve even when service seems to be in vain?

A Sinner

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II

A SINNER

THE history of the Church is the record of honour which God has bestowed upon elect souls, and some of those honours are to be chiefly coveted, and those who receive them are ever to be envied. The man, for instance, who first was called by the Divine voice, and in his faith left home and friends, to follow God; the first prophet whose ear the Almighty uncovered, and who declared the will of God

with authority to his generation; the first disciple who accepted the Son of God as his master, and entered on the way of the Holy Cross; and the first martyr who laid down his life for the love of the Lord, and sealed his testimony to the gospel with his own blood. Neither the passing of centuries nor the changes of life can depose those favoured persons from their place, nor take away their crown. Yet there remains an honour more intimate and more gracious, which marked the daybreak of the Church, and that was to be the first witness of the Lord's resurrection. The thoughts of our Master are not as ours, neither are His ways as

our ways. Having this guerdon of His love to bestow—the first crown from the hands of the risen King—He did not choose St. Peter of the apostles, nor St. John among his friends, but He revealed Himself to one whom He had lifted from the depths of sin and set upon the heights of love—and the Lord 'appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils.'

This faithful lover of the Lord had been among the four women who had found the empty grave at the rising of the sun, and she had already been distinguished as the messenger to carry the good tidings to Peter and John.

Joy had winged her feet as she went with the angel's words, and, drawn by the irresistible attraction of the empty tomb, she followed the two apostles to the garden. Her woman's step, even with the aid of hope, could not keep time with men who must needs run that they might verify the amazing tale. When Mary came to the place the apostles had come and gone. The garden was empty, and she was alone. And then set in the reaction which follows moments of supreme emotion. The shining ones had told her that Christ was risen, and for the moment, overcome by their authority, she had believed and been glad, for

she took for granted that if the Lord were risen He would immediately be seen, and that she who had come to care for His body would look upon His face. Had she been deceived, and believed what was too good to be true? Risen He might be; gone He certainly was. The longing for sight, which is strong with us all, and most imperious with a woman whose whole affection centres in a person, took hold of Mary Magdalene and overwhelmed both faith and hope. Had she only the dear remains upon which she had counted in the morning she would not be utterly bereaved, but now she stretched out her hands and her heart to emptiness,

and Mary Magdalene tasted the agony of those passionate hearts which rise in turn to the height of sunlit joy to sink into the black depths of despair.

Far from the tomb she could not wander, who was now indeed carrying that grave within her heart; and again she looked in, who did not venture to enter. The servants of the Lord were there as before, to meet and comfort, for none are more faithful and patient in our days of trouble than the angels; but it is a proof of her hopelessness that their presence brought her now no cheer. Her heart in its foolishness of love had read too much into their words, though

they seemed plain enough an hour ago; now she was compelled to take them at the lowest meaning; now she would put aside her fond grief and be practical and sensible. She had been weeping in the garden and looking into the sepulchre; she still wept, but behind the tears she had her design—the only service and the only comfort left to her. 'Woman,' said the shining one, 'why weepest thou?'—to whom we brought good tidings, who lately was so glad. She does not reproach them with the words which had deceived her, or with which she had deceived herself; it was no use inquiring who was to blame.

She would take things as they stood. And this was plain to her, that Jesus might be gone, but He was not alive, or else He had made Himself known to the fond hearts who loved Him, and whom He loved. One complaint only she had to make, and she knew not to whom to make it. 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.' She wept now because the tomb was empty, as once she had wept because it was filled. She had rejoiced in the hope of seeing her living Lord; she were content now with a dead Lord. She says 'my Lord,' with a woman's sense of jealous possession, with a woman's

resentment of a stranger's interference.

The angels did not answer Mary, for they saw what she did not yet see, and they knew that their work was done; they might leave the grave now, and go upon other errands, for the Lord had come Himself to be His disciple's comforter. Even while she spoke to the angels Mary had a sense that some one was standing near. It may have been the shadow flung upon the tomb, or the sound of His footsteps, or only the feeling of a human presence; but without waiting for the angel's answer, Mary turned round. Some one was standing near her; who he was

she could not tell, for she hardly looked at him, and her eyes were dim with weeping; but whoever he might be, at least he was compassionate, and understanding. He took up the angel's question, which will be asked of woman while the world last: 'Why weepest thou?' And then he showed that he could enter into a woman's heart, for he added, 'Whom seekest thou?' For men seek after gold and honour, and weep when they do not get them; but women seek after love, and weep when the loved one is lost. 'What seekest thou?' had been more likely for a man, 'Whom seekest thou?' was the tribute paid to a woman.

Some note in his words caught her ear, and suggested to her mind the solution of this mystery. She remembered that Jesus, having no grave of His own, had been dependent on a stranger for His resting-place, and was indeed only a guest in the matter of a grave. Since she had known the Lord He had owned no home, and had laid His head beneath the roof of strangers, and now He had suffered the strangers' penalty. For a night they had allowed Him to rest in this rich man's tomb, because there was no other place to put Him; but now they had removed His body, that this fine sepulchre might be left vacant for the owner; and

Jesus' body had been laid out of sight in some common ground. This man had charge of the garden, and most likely had directed the removal. It was an inhospitable thing to do; heartless, and cruel to the poor dead, who had room in His heart for all strangers and their sorrows. They might have allowed the Lord to lie in peace, who had given peace to many souls. But there was no use complaining. Mary had no heart for reproaches nor for arguments. She was a woman who once could have spoken and made men's ears tingle; she had love enough in her heart to be a raging fire, and to burn any one who touched

her beloved. To-day she was a broken and humbled woman with only one desire—to find 'my Lord.' She would be respectful even and conciliatory with this servant, who in his little hour of authority had rifled the grave, and cast out her Lord, and crowned the inhospitality of history. 'Sir,' she said to him, 'if it is thou who hast borne Him hence, I have only one thing to ask, if thou wilt grant it of thy goodness. Tell me the corner, hidden and out of the way, where thou hast laid Him. I make no complaint, but for thee He was nothing but a crucified man, but He was everything to me. You will not be troubled with Him in

this garden, for though I be only a woman, helpless and despised, I will take my Lord away, and find for Him a grave that shall be His own, and mine. This is all I can do, but if you will only show me the place, this I will do, for it is nothing compared to what He did for me.'

While she spoke she did not look at the gardener, but rather turned aside, as a woman in such a moment of strong feeling was likely to do. For an instant there was silence, and then the gardener said, 'Mary!' It was only a single word, but a word can be more than volumes spoken by the lips which speak it. Between strangers a word is only

so many syllables and so much sound; it means just what it must mean on the surface, and nothing more. Between friends who have passed through chief moments of life together, who have lived in closest fellowship, who, looking into one another's eyes, have seen one another's hearts, a word becomes a symbol, and a message, and a revelation, and a gift. For a stranger to call you by your name is nothing, no more than if he had called you by a figure. When the person whom you love pronounces your name, the sound goes through your being, awakening sacred memories and making tender your heart. The name now is

poetry and music; it is a golden cup filled with cordial; it is a casket filled with jewels. Jesus had a way of saying 'Mary' which no other had, and she never knew how beautiful her name was till it fell from His lips; and at the sound of the word the mist passed away from her eyes, and the gardener changed into 'my Lord.'

Turning swiftly round at the bidding of the word, she flung herself at Jesus' feet, and would have taken Him by His garments, crying in her native dialect, to which people fall back in their tenderest moments, 'my Master.' The angels then had spoken the truth, and she had understood

them aright in the morning hour. The grave was empty, not because it had been robbed of the dead body, but because the Lord was alive again. All He had said had come true. How had they ever forgotten it? All they could ever have hoped was now real. How should they ever have doubted it? The dark and bitter day which had so tried her heart was over, and now the little company of friends would gather together once more, and go down to Galilee, and live as they did before the shadow of the Cross fell upon them. How good God had been, for she had only asked to have the Lord's body and a place where she could

lay it, that there she might weep every year at Passover time. But, behold, she had the Lord's own living self—' my Master.'

When Jesus replied to Mary and almost drew Himself away, saying, ' Lay no hold upon me,' it seemed unlike our Lord, and a chilling return for her love. One remembers how He responded to a woman's touch when she had only faith enough to grasp the hem of His garment, how He welcomed a woman's devotion when she anointed His feet with ointment; and now He would not allow this joyful disciple to clasp His feet in the supreme moment of relief and gladness. His explanation, however, follows

close upon His refusal, and turns it into a revelation. Better things were in store for Mary than she had imagined, for the Resurrection was only the prelude to the Ascension, and the Ascension would begin the perfect fellowship. Jesus was to ascend to His father and their Father, to His God and their God. And in the Father Jesus and all His disciples were brethren, and would live together, the brother life as it were, in the Father's house. It would not be, as in time past, that they should see Him one day, and be separated from Him the next, that they should depend upon His spoken words and His visible presence,

for He would be with them always and in all places, sharing their lot both in joy and sorrow, and living in their hearts. Mary and the other disciples had known the Lord in the flesh; they would know Him henceforward in the spirit. And they who had learned to love Him whom they saw, must learn to trust Him when unseen. He had risen from the dead, and by and by He would ascend into the heavenly places, and their faith must rise from earth to heaven, till it was rooted and grounded in the Lord, at the right hand of God the Father.

They are blessed between whom and the Master there have been such passages of friendship

that He calls them by their name with the accent of love, and who at the sound of their name can recognise their Lord. It matters not to them in what circumstances of their life they meet the Lord, nor how He appears. They need no evidences and no testimony to identify Him. It is enough that He should call, and their souls, hearing in their name His password, answer back, 'Master.' Twice blessed are they whose faith is not confined to times and seasons, to rites and sacraments, but has so apprehended the risen and spiritual Christ that He is ever with them—in the city where the multitude is hurrying to and

fro, as well as in the garden where there is none passing; in the place of feasting where He shows His grace of humility and service, and at the grave's mouth where He brings life and comfort. Most blessed they who shall see the Lord in the dawning of the Resurrection morning, and shall follow Him when sorrow has passed away, and He leads His people to living fountains of water.

A Backslider

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III

A BACKSLIDER

THE second appearance of our Lord on Easter Day is veiled in a certain mystery of circumstances, for there is no record of where it took place or of what passed between the two. Few words may, however, record a chief fact, and their very brevity is invested with significance; and it is with marked emphasis that St. Luke reports the joyful greeting of the disciples on the evening of the great day, when

they said to the friends returning from Emmaus, 'The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.' And in St. Paul's chapter of immortal hope, when he declares the doctrine of the resurrection to the Corinthian Church, he writes: 'He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve.'

The understanding of the disciples on that day of spiritual intensity was quick, and their hearts were tender; and one gathers that they entered into the singular grace of our Lord's revelation to Simon Peter. Before the chief day in human history—a day more charged with hope and strength than all other days put together—had

come to an end, the Master would show Himself unto the body of His disciples, but it was His will for reasons of His goodness to meet in private with certain of His friends. First He showed Himself to Mary Magdalene in the morning, because she loved so much, and forever in the experience of the soul love will have the earliest vision and the gentlest, though it may see through tears. The second was at noontide of the day, and it was to an apostle, because he had sinned so much and was so utterly broken-hearted, and repentance will never fail to secure the Lord's presence and the showing of His face. First to

Mary Magdalene (and to other women also). Next to St. Peter, earliest witness from among the apostles.

Were merit the rule of our Lord's dealing with His disciples, then it would fare differently with many of us, and He had not appeared after this fashion to Simon Peter. If this honour had gone by deserts, then one apostle might have claimed it for his own, and he had received it by consent, both of his Lord and of his brethren. They were not lifted above petty jealousies, those twelve apostles of the Lord, nor were they overwilling to honour one another, but yet they did ac-

knowledge that one was nearest to the Master. They gave John his place where he could lay his head on the Master's breast; through him they put their questions to the Master; he had followed the Master to the high priest's palace; he had stood beside the Master's cross; into his hands Jesus had entrusted His mother, and this apostle had in his home the dearest treasure of his Lord. It might have been expected that, as John had been the last apostle with whom Jesus spake before He laid down His life, he would have been the first whom Jesus would greet after He had taken up His life again. There would have been a fitness in the

words: 'The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto John'; and none of the apostles would have had the heart to grudge.

It is like the Lord to be guided not by His personal liking, but by that spirit of service which He ever preached; and so He went not first to John, because He loved him most, but to Peter, because Peter needed Him most. One dares to believe in justice to the apostles that, if the Lord had asked them to choose that one from among their number to whom they desired Him to go without delay, they would have mentioned Simon Peter; for none

of them, not even Thomas, was in such a strait, and none of them, not even John, was in his heart more loyal. It was like the Lord to do this thing, and made the Lord dearer to them than ever, and it was a sure evidence that He had risen from the dead, that, out of the eleven, He had appeared first to Simon Peter.

It had been St. Peter's fault that he ever wished to be first, and first he had been, but not in honour, nor in service, but first, without any rivalry, in treachery. There is a competition in sin, and sins have their comparative value of demerit, and there can be no question that St. Peter outdistanced all his brethren, when

one looks at the pathetic and intimate circumstances of his sin. The other disciples had boasted what they would do for their Lord; but they were only Peter's chorus, compelled to keep tune with him when he declared his valiant loyalty. The other disciples had also slept in the garden, but they had not promised to be the Lord's bodyguard. They all fled and left their Lord; but none of them, except this man, had gone into the high priest's palace, and thrust himself among the guards of Christ, as if on very purpose to put the Lord to shame, and do Him greater insult than when His enemies spat upon His face

and pressed the jagged thorns upon His brow.

Judas Iscariot had plotted against the Lord, and betrayed Him to the priests, and sold Him for money, and kissed Him on the mouth. It was a hideous and incredible crime, and—taken simply in itself as a bare, black fact—that is the master crime of the human race. But Judas had always been a man of mean, lean soul, hedged round and blinded by this present world, and incapable of spiritual vision. He had never been the friend of Jesus, and never had been touched by the divine fascination of the Master; he had never entered into the Master's mind, or had a

glimpse of the glory of the kingdom of God.

Simon Peter was one of the Lord's first disciples, who had been prepared by the Baptist for Christ, and had thrown himself into the Master's cause with generous, uncalculating enthusiasm. He had hung upon the Master's lips, he had laid himself at the Master's feet, he had loved the Master with all his heart, and had been willing, as he believed, to die for the Master's sake. This man had made the chief confession of the New Testament, and this man had received the Lord's chief promise. And it was he who had gone out of

his way to deny the Lord, and invested his denial with every circumstance of offence. Choosing the time when the Lord needed friends most, taking for his witnesses the ignoble rabble of the high priest's servants, trampling upon his flag at the invitation of a serving girl, asserting that not only was he not a friend of Jesus, but that he did not even know Him, and crowning all this falsehood and ignominy by curses which he had learned at his fishing trade, but had forgotten for a while in Jesus's company. If in the world Judas must have the place of chief sinner, within the Church it belongs to Simon Peter, to whom

the Lord revealed Himself alone on Easter Day.

According to Simon Peter's sin was the keenness of his remorse, and among the disciples there was none, and could be none, with a heart so sore on Easter Day. They all mourned because they had lost their Lord, but between their regret and his there was a great gulf fixed, since they had only lost, but he had also denied. They had seen the Lord last in the moonlight of Gethsemane, sad enough sight; he had seen Him last in the firelight of the high priest's palace, far sadder sight. In the garden Jesus had interceded for

the eleven that they might go free; but in the courtyard He had looked on him, and he had gone bound with sorrow into the darkness.

They all longed to see their Lord again, but none of them had a reason so keen; for the ten only desired to satisfy themselves with His visible presence, who had been the light of their lives, but he had to ask His forgiving mercy for the last outrage on friendship. If only he could have one minute alone with his Lord, although he never saw Him again, to explain himself, and to beseech forgiveness! He could not even now tell how he had come to do so cruel and wicked an action,

but he could entreat the Lord to believe that his heart was not utterly that of a traitor, and that he was not, whatever it might appear, the same as Judas. What he had done he had done, and there was no one to blame but himself, his pride, his boasting, and his cowardice; but still he loved, and in the depths of his heart was true.

He lashed himself with scorn and bitter self-upbraiding, more cruel than the thongs which lacerated the shoulders of the Master, but Jesus did not know. He cried aloud, and broke the night air with his weeping, but Jesus could not see. All Jesus

had seen was His apostle keeping company with the high priest's servants, and swearing aloud that he had never known his Lord. Too late now to repent, too late now to ask forgiveness; it mattered nothing to the Lord now who denied Him or who insulted Him, for He had passed beyond all earthly words, and was at rest, but Peter never more could be at rest. O that the dead could be brought back for the briefest time that we might tell them that we had not intended so to wound them, or so to neglect them! But they sleep in peace; it is for us there cannot be peace forever.

It was like the Lord that His

pity should rest upon this man, and others like him, beyond all who have sinned and sorrowed; for Jesus ever counted the agony of the heart greater than the agony of the life. He had compassion on the widow who lost her only son, and on the ruler who lost his little girl, because He loved children and they loved Him; but the chief sorrow of the world is not the death of friends. He wept over Jerusalem, which knew not the day of her visitation, and had rejected the anointed of the Lord; He was cast down by Judas's betrayal, and was in pain till Judas left; but even unbelief and treachery of evil hearts are not the chief sorrow. The most cruel

of all spiritual agonies is that of the backslider who has been received into the Father's house with mercy and with joy and has gone again into the far country; who has been decked with the robe and with the ring, and has sold them for riotous living; who has abused the very love of God and made His grave an opportunity for sin. When he cometh to himself, it is with weeping and with trembling, and with the sorrow of his heart none can meddle. Therefore is it that there are no promises in Scripture so appealing and so tender as those which are sent after the backslider by the voice of the prophets, as if God, who had

been Himself so deeply wounded, alone could estimate the broken heart of them who wounded Him. None understood Simon Peter like the Master, and none could enter so entirely into his remorse. While Peter thought of Jesus, his Master was thinking of him, and one of the first errands of the risen Lord was to bind up the broken heart of His penitent apostle.

Where they met we are not told, but we may allow ourselves to guess. It was not in the upper room, for Peter could not appear among the disciples till he had been restored by the Lord; it would not be in John's

kindly house, nor could it be in any public place, for this meeting must be in secret. It is not likely that on that day which had opened with the message of Mary Magdalene and the sight of the empty grave, that agitated heart could contain itself within any walls, however friendly, and we may assume that St. Peter went out and sought for some place where he could spend the time surrounded by the memory of his Lord. Was it not most probable that he turned to that garden whither he had gone with the Lord from the upper room, and where he had been afforded so great an intimacy, so that where the Lord's

own soul had been wrung till He sweated as it were great drops of blood, he might also suffer and there—who knows?—might be remembered of the Lord? Did he seek out the very spot where he had seen Jesus lie, and there cast himself?

What passed between them, when of a sudden the Lord with the marks of the Passion upon Him, but the cup of the Father's will now filled with joy, stood beside His prostrate apostle, no evangelist has recorded, because neither Peter nor the Lord ever told. There was to be a public conversation between them, full of beautiful emotions which

would be recorded for our instruction, but that was to come later. There are secrets of religion which cannot be put in words, and which it were a spiritual indecency to breathe. There are revelations of God given to the soul which belong to the third heavens and not to earth. There are convictions which are surer than anything which can be seen, but of which we can give no proof to our fellowmen. 'I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord,' so wrote the penitent backslider of the Old Testament, 'and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.' Here were the prayer and the answer, but

in between came that moment where there can be no witness, of which there can be no description.

He could not trust his melting soul
But in his Maker's sight ;—
Then why should gentle hearts and true
Bare to the rude world's withering view
Their treasure of delight ?

Within that hour St. Peter was again converted and came forth a new man. Never again would he exalt himself above his brethren, save in his willingness to suffer; never again would he talk of himself, save of his own unworthiness. He would be tried in days to come as he had never been before, and he who had denied the Lord at the

word of a girl would confess the same Lord before the rulers of the people, and he who had shrunk from the contempt of serving men would take a scourging for the Lord's sake joyfully. Boldly would he preach the gospel, bravely would he lead the Church, humbly at last would he die. He had been called in the Lord's vast charity, who saw the best and not the worst in every one of His disciples, 'a rock man,' and he had proved to be only shifting sand, but now in this fierce fire of penitence and mercy, the mercy more melting even than the penitence, the sand had been welded into iron, and on the foundation of this man's faith so

clear, so modest, so lasting, would be reared the Church of the living God, wherein every stone is a sinner converted, forgiven and sanctified.

Simon Peter has not been the only disciple who denied and repented, and there have been many secret meetings between the Lord and His Peters since the first Easter Day. If any one be overtaken by temptation and fall, to the grief of the Lord and the undoing of his own soul, it is good for him that he should be covered with shame and that his heart should be broken, that he should go for a while into spiritual darkness, and be grieved in his soul before all men. He sorrows

not in such days as those who have no hope, nor is he misunderstood or forgotten of his Lord. This same Jesus remembers not so much how His disciple failed in a single moment of trial, as how he has loved all the other moments of his life: not so much what His disciple did in the weakness of his will, but what he intended to do in the loyalty of his heart. If Jesus seems to tarry, and leaves him alone for a little in his Gethsemane, it is while he intercedes for him with the Father, and explains that this man after all is a good disciple and a true Son of God. When the time is ripe and the disciple's heart is ready, then will

the Lord appear. When no man is present and the world is as if it never had been, in a secret place He will hear the disciple's confession. In that hour the disciple can do nothing, except lie at the Lord's feet, and He will seal upon the penitent soul His word of full forgiveness. It is from such experiences the soul comes forth strong through humility, consecrated through gratitude, and joyful through vision, to suffer and to conquer, and so the gentleness of the Lord makes us great.

Two Ordinary People

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IV

TWO ORDINARY PEOPLE

THE appearances of our Lord on Easter Day illustrate the sovereignty of His love as much as the mystery of His body. In the early dawn, when the dew was still fresh upon the earth, Jesus revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene; when it was noontide of the day, and men were hiding from the heat, He sought out St. Peter; when it was toward evening, and the weary were returning from their labour,

He joined Himself to Cleopas and his friends; and, when the darkness had fallen and the doors were shut, He appeared unto the company of the disciples. He showed Himself in Joseph's garden, and also in the garden of Gethsemane, upon a highroad and in the upper room. Once He rewarded love, once He absolved penitence, once He enlightened darkness, once He came to confer grace upon His Church; but the interview which is described most carefully and tenderly is that which the Master had with the travellers to Emmaus.

Our Master has a warm place in His heart for ordinary people.

When Jesus seeks out two disciples on Easter Day, and Himself expounds to them the Scriptures, journeying with them upon the road and entering into their homes, it is natural for us to take for granted that they must be distinguished persons in the Church, and to be curious about their history. There have been many attempts to identify Cleopas, and to put a name upon his friend; but they have all come to nothing, for the only thing we know about the former is that we must not suppose him to be the same person as the Cleopas whose wife stood at the Cross, because, although the words are the same in our Eng-

lish Bible—the Cleopas of St. John's Gospel and this Cleopas of St. Luke's—they are not the same in the original. And as regards his friend, no one can hope to lift the curtain which hides him from our recognition.

They appear, those two, for the first time upon the highroad where any one can travel, and they disappear when the incident closes; they have no claim on fame; they are two unknown men, who were not apostles nor chief saints, who had never done any great thing except once constrained the Lord to abide, and who never passed through any great emotion except once, when their hearts burned within

them listening to the Saviour. They represent not the aristocracy of the Church, who have preached the gospel to the nation, or ruled the house of God, or won the martyr's crown, or opened the mystery of the faith unto their brethren. They are two of the multitude which make up the body of the Church, and it is comforting to know that Christ had a thought of them when He rose from the dead.

After all, there are not many distinguished people, famous by their talents and services; the enormous majority of us are commonplace and obscure. As

the race passes before our eyes across the stage of history, how few we recognise!—a poet, a prophet, an explorer, a conqueror; and the rest, they were born and lived, and did their duty and died. Among all the people in our city or our country, there may not be one whose name will be known a hundred years hence, and the great person of our little circle has not been heard of a mile away.

There are times when we ordinary folk are discouraged because our life is so limited and our sky so grey, but we ought to remind ourselves that we are not forgotten of God, and we ought not to complain if we are loved

by even one person. We may be lost in the crowd and seem to be nothing; but in our homes we are everything, and it does not matter so very much that our name will be unknown to future generations if it be mentioned with affection by two or three people to-day.

As you travel on the railroad, you pity some countryman who is a fellow-passenger, because he has seen so little and has so few things to think about, has such a difficulty in speech, and is so unattractive in appearance. 'A poverty-stricken life,' you say to yourself; 'a dull, insensible soul.' Wait a moment, and you

will correct your judgment; for now the train begins to slow and the countryman's face begins to brighten. He looks out at the window, and marks the familiar landscape; he is coming near his home, and is thinking of them who are waiting for him. A woman and two children are standing on the platform; they wave their hands to him as the train comes in, and he, as best he can, responds.

As he leaves the train, which is a foreign place to him, you hear his wife call him by his Christian name, and the accent of her voice glorifies the word, for it testifies to his faithfulness and to her love, and the children

take him round the neck; and it is with another thought of him and of his life that you follow the little group going down the road till amid the hedge-rows they are lost to sight. Somewhere among the greenery this labouring man has a home; and there in his three rooms, with his little garden and simple possessions, with his wife and children, he is content.

Love dignifies and satisfies the heart as rank and riches and learning and achievements can never do, and the chief love of human experience is the love of Jesus Christ. Does it matter much that our names are unknown to men, if they be known

to the Lord; that they shall have no place in history, if they be written in the Lamb's book of life; that no one recognises our faces as we trudge along our way, if the risen Lord, who has the worship of the heavenly hosts, should join us on the road and keep us company?

Ordinary people are glorified by a spiritual passion. Cleopas and his friend were two country folk who worked hard for their living, and were bowed down with toil, and were poorly dressed, and had most likely unlovely manners. Yesterday one had passed them without notice as if they had been sheep, but

to-day they demand attention from any one who has an eye and a heart. They are afflicted by such sorrow that it shows itself in their carriage, and has given another expression to their faces. They have found speech who used to travel in silence, and are so absorbed with their grief, whatever it may be, that they have no thought for other travellers.

No one is commonplace when he is touched by an unselfish emotion; for he is raised above himself, and commands your respect and admiration. The stupidest man who ever lived, sorrowing for his dead wife; the vagrant of the highways,

bending over her sick child; the street arab of the city, forgetting his rags to rejoice in his country's victory; the criminal breaking down as he bids his mother good-bye, may not be despised. The simplest emotion elevates the humblest, but the passion of religion glorifies it.

When a Highland shepherd spends the night upon the moor wrestling in prayer to assure himself of God, he is greater than kings upon the throne and philosophers in their studies. And, when these two men went down from Jerusalem to Emmaus heart-broken, not because they had lost gold or silver or even earthly friends, but because they

had lost their Lord, 'who should have redeemed Israel,' then are they lifted above the circumstances of their lives and the narrowness of their minds. They take spiritual rank before Gamaliel, who with all his learning was not wise enough to recognise the Lord; and before the priests, who knew not what to do with Christ except to crucify Him; and before the mighty procurator of Judæa, who had not courage enough to do justice.

Jesus comforted His disciples by ordinary means. It was like the Lord to seek out those who missed Him and to satisfy those who desired Him, but His

method of revelation seems at first sight strange and slow. Why did He not say, 'Cleopas,' with that sound of love in the word that would have opened the eyes of His true friend? So in a moment their sorrow had been turned into joy. Why, instead thereof, did He turn to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and spend the time in exposition which might have been used in revelation? Why delay the revelation so long and require so elaborate a preparation for its climax?

Because the Master was thinking not only of that day, but of the days that were to come in the life of Cleopas and his friend,

and also of the disciples who were to follow in future ages. It was not enough to captivate the senses of the two companions by a physical manifestation; it was necessary to convince their reason by a lasting proof; not enough to show that having suffered He had risen, but to make plain that it was becoming He should suffer, and certain that, if He accepted the cross, He would receive the crown. For this end Jesus took His disciples a long way back, and brought them by the way of Moses and the law, of Isaiah and the gospel, to the Cross of Calvary, showing them that all things which had happened at

Jerusalem were in the purpose of God, and were the terminus of a long history.

Jesus did not dazzle their eyes; He carried their reason, and therefore, if at any time to come wise people should say unto Cleopas that he had only dreamed, and imagined he saw the Lord, whom he wished to see, then the disciple would rest himself on the argument of the Old Testament, and call in Moses and the prophets to establish his faith. And, if the disciple of to-day, coming down from his Jerusalem in despair of faith, complains that there is no Lord to meet him on the way,

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and comfort his heart, the Master, who is not far off nor unmindful of him, bids him open a yet richer Bible than Moses and the prophets, and therein discover the reason for Christ's death and the assurance that Christ has risen. And, if the Master expounds not to our ears the Holy Scriptures, He opens them to the heart by His Spirit, and every generation is sent to the written word which is the testimony of the Lord.

When ordinary people obtain a revelation it is their wisdom to make the most of it. The owner of a gallery may enjoy the pictures at his leisure, but the

visitor of an hour must make good use of his time. The volumes of a great library show little sign of usage, but the poor man's twenty books are thin with handling. The man who has never worked knows not how to keep holiday, but the toiler uses every moment of his time of rest. When heaven is ever open to elect souls they need not make haste, but if one only gets a glimpse now and again, he must seize his opportunity with all his might. Never before had Cleopas travelled in such company; when would he be favoured after this fashion again? He glanced at his friend and his friend at him, and they saw the

same desire in one another's eyes. They were on the threshold of an unspeakable blessing, and it will not be their blame if they do not possess it. They have come to their destination, and the stranger makes as though He would bid them good-bye and go on His way down the darkening road. But if that were His intention, He had not counted on Cleopas and his friend, nor had He considered what He Himself had done. If He must go on His way, He ought not to have joined Himself to those two men and caused their hearts to burn, and lifted their hopes, and brought them to the height of expectation. He ought not to

have done so much unless He was going to do more; and, at any rate, whatever be the Master's mind, the mind of the two disciples is clear and fixed. It must be in spite of them that Jesus will escape from Emmaus that evening. And now, as in Angelico's beautiful picture, Cleopas has arrested Jesus by his pilgrim staff, and his friend has laid hold of the Master's arm. They are no longer disheartened and listless, they are now two determined men who may not be trifled with nor put aside. The shadows are falling fast; why should this traveller pursue His journey? He must rest somewhere; why not in Cleopas's

house? It is a little home, but there is room for this stranger; they have not much to offer, but all they have shall be His. Never had our Lord a sadder experience than when He called and no man regarded, than when he knocked and no man opened; never had He a gladder heart than on that night when two obscure men stood in the highroad, so that He could not pass them, and with the violence of love compelled Him to be their guest. He remained who had desired nothing more than this invitation; He was helpless in their hands who was most willing to be vanquished.

When vision comes to ordinary people it is the outcome of their past experience. It is open for any one to say that the bread which Jesus blessed, and in which He revealed Himself, was the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, but it is quite as likely that it was their evening meal. And if it were so, one comes to understand how they recognised Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Although they were not apostles, and were not Jesus's intimates, yet they had been His disciples, and must often have been in His company. They had journeyed with Him along the Galilean roads, and at mid-day had sat down upon the ground when

Jesus gave the barley bread to His disciples. Their place would be on the outer circle, far away from John and Peter, but on that very account, because they were not so near the Lord, they would watch Him the more closely, as poor people in the back seats of churches have often a keener interest in their minister than those with whom he is ever mixing. They knew how Jesus looked on such an occasion—the turn of His hands, the attitude of His body, the expression of His eyes, with little touches which they had often mentioned to one another as they followed the Lord at a distance, but carried Him in their hearts.

Although they did not suspect it, their unassuming and unaffected devotion had not been unnoticed of the Lord, and it was not to go without its due reward. They had been two out of many once, to-night they would be two with Jesus alone. They had stood afar in their humility, they would be brought very near to-night. The day will come, and may come suddenly, to the honest, modest disciple, when his patient obedience in the little things of life, and his faithful affection from a distance, and his frequent tender thoughts of the Lord, like fuel gathered and treasured in his soul, will suddenly be touched, as by the

Spirit of the Lord, and blaze into light, and in the light thereof he will see the Lord's face. Because the two had loved the Lord so kindly, and had watched Him in days gone by, He was known to them that evening in the breaking of bread.

Vision is for the moment, but the light thereof transforms the ordinary life. No sooner had the Lord been recognised than He vanished from their sight, but though the appearance was only for a moment the power thereof was for life. They rose and returned to Jerusalem, but not the same men nor by the same road, for now all things had been made

new for them both within and without. Life has another colour and another end because it has another hope, when we know for a certainty that the Lord has risen from the dead. We are assured of another world of the blessed departed, of the immortal soul, of the victory of holiness. We go on our way to commonplace duties and varied trials, but we are encompassed with a cloud of witnesses; we are reinforced by heavenly grace, we travel beneath an open heaven, we see our Lord at the right hand of God. Our faces are now set steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem, not to the sorrow of the cross, which is over, but to the

glory of the victory which Christ has achieved; and as each one comes to his brethren with the joy of his own vision, his testimony is drowned in the voice of the whole company of the disciples, declaring, before he can speak, that the Lord is risen indeed.

The Company of Disciples

V

THE COMPANY OF DISCIPLES

It is a pleasant argument where the Church of Christ was born, and various places contend for this honour. There is the Mountain in Galilee where the Lord laid down the conditions of His kingdom; there is the lake side where He wrought His works of mercy; there is the Cross where He achieved His victory; there is Pentecost when He came in power. But it is

open to hold that the Church of the New Testament began her history when, at the close of Easter Day, the apostles and those with them gathered in the upper room and, the doors being shut, the Lord appeared and bestowed upon them His peace and His Spirit.

During the day He had appeared to one and another, enlightening their darkness, and filling them with gladness, and so He had been preparing for the revelation of the evening. It is His habit first to inflame the hearts of a few, and then, when the Church is in a state of expectation, to declare Himself unto the body of His people.

When Peter and Cleopas have been comforted and know that 'He is risen indeed,' when they have borne their testimony and spread their hope among the brethren, then of a sudden the Lord appears. And the sign which He gave on that first night, and always gives, the convincing and final proof of His identity, is the sign of the Passion. He shows unto His disciples His hands and His feet.

As a river carries with it to the sea the character of its birthplace—green, because it sprang from a glacier and has been fed from the slopes of snow; or clear, because it flowed from a lake and has received the waters of many

a mountain stream, so the Church of Christ bears the mark of her Lord. As Judaism has been a standing monument to the spirit of the Prophet of Sinai, so the Christian Church, when she is true to herself, is the very incarnation of her Lord. According to sight, Jesus may have lived barely thirty-three years in this world; but, according to faith, after nineteen centuries He is the chief force in human life, through His body, which is the Church; and any one can recognise that body, because of the nail-prints on the hands and feet.

By the sign of His hands and His feet the Lord called His

Church to be the witness to His Passion. It is the duty of His disciples to make known everywhere the law of the Lord, who is the chief Prophet of God, and the life of the Lord, who is the type of holiness, but the Church has failed and missed the heart of the mystery of Christ if she does not represent Him as the Crucified. What distinguished Him from every other teacher which the world has received from God is that He not only declared God by His word and by His life, but that He also reconciles us to God by His Cross and by His death. He is more than teacher, He is also Saviour, and the Christ on whom the

wounds are hidden may on the first sight of Him be more attractive to flesh and blood, because there is in Him nothing to pain or offend us, but He is not the Christ of the Gospels nor the power of God. He may have loved us, but not unto the bitterness of Gethsemane; He may instruct us, He cannot reinforce us; He may delight us, He cannot redeem us. The Cross was not a lamentable incident in the life of Jesus, to be regretted and forgotten; it was the end for which He came into the world, it was the work which He had to do. When He had died upon that Cross He had not done with it, and when He

rose from the dead He did not forget it. No sooner had His executioner taken down the two beams of wood and removed the traces of the Crucifixion from the hill called Calvary, than Jesus set up that Cross for ever on the hill of Sion and placed it in the heart of the Church. The print of the nails and the hollow of the spear were taken up into the body of His glory and are continued there for ever. From the circle of Calvary the Church cannot depart without leaving her Lord and denying that she had ever known Him. There is not one of her doctrines which does not bear in its warp and woof the red thread of Christ's

sacrifice. Her two beautiful Sacraments are both the picture of His death; Baptism, wherein we are cleansed by His blood; and the Lord's Supper, wherein we are fed by His broken body. The disciples cannot meet for worship without offering their prayers, through the intercession of their great High Priest, who has carried His sacrifice within the veil, and they cannot escape the hymns of the Cross in their praise to God. When the hearts of the disciples have grown cold and their minds shallow, they have covered the signs of the Passion, casting the Cross from out of their doctrine, and erasing it from their hymns, and then

the Church has ceased to be the body of Christ and has been ready to perish. False Christs also have appeared among the disciples and have claimed to be the Master, speaking words of human wisdom and prophesying smooth things; but they have always been detected and refused, for when He cometh there is no mistaking Jesus, and where He dwelleth there is no mistaking the Church, for the sign of the Lord and of His Church is the same, the wound-prints on the hands and feet.

By His wounds the Lord also baptizes the Church into His sympathy. It is something which

ought ever to be remembered and insisted upon, that the Christian Church was not founded by one who was learned or rich, or honoured or successful, for then she would have been the home for wise and great people, and would have had no place for the poor and the suffering. Her Lord passed through the lowest depths of privation and humiliation, till it came to pass that no one could be poorer and no one worse used, and so His Church is the refuge for those who are broken-hearted and have failed through their sins or through their sorrows. When Christianity becomes high and mighty, when she forms alliances with the

world and is increased in goods, when she despises the meek and the humble, when she is hard and merciless, then has she denied her Lord and herself, and lost the print of the nails. The labouring and the heavy laden, the outcast, and the penitent came to Jesus as to a friend, and after the same fashion, and with the same confidence, they ought to come to His Church, and they should receive from her the same welcome as from the Lord. By her tenderness the Church is to be distinguished from all other bodies on the face of the earth, because, having been baptized into the Passion of the Lord, she carries for ever

His heart of love. Her preaching must be tried by this test, not is it eloquent or profound, but does it comfort, breaking not the bruised reed, quenching not the smoking flax, putting strength in them who were ready to die, and lifting up those who were cast down. Her operations must be judged, not by their worldly size and success, by numbers and noise and wealth, but by their spirit of quietness and gentleness. And this must ever be a chief condition of her fellowship, that the proud and the self-righteous have no entrance, but that the door be ever open for the widow of Nain and Zaccheus the publican, and

the woman who was a sinner, and the penitent thief. And the signs of their encouragement shall be this—the marks on the hands and feet.

By His wounds the Lord calls His Church to austerity of life. There is no master so gentle or so severe as Jesus, for He gives the most generous invitation and the kindliest welcome when we come to Him; He lays us on the hardest service and demands of us the hardest sacrifices after we have come. 'Peace be unto you,' He said that night to the disciples, and He breathed upon them that they might receive His spirit; but before James lay a

speedy martyrdom, and before John a lonely exile, before them all bonds and sufferings. For Christ hath two words of power: one is 'come,' which draws us to His side, where there is peace for evermore; and the other is 'follow,' which draws us after Him, where He carries His Cross in the paths of life. The wounds of Christ are first of all the hope and hiding-place of the soul; afterwards they turn into the soul's standard and obligation. As there is a false Christianity which banishes the Cross from thought, there is another which banishes the Cross from life, and as the one makes no distinction between Jesus and other teachers,

save His deeper wisdom and His higher goodness, so the latter does not separate the Christian life from the world life, except in a finer degree of purity and of charity; but the true Christianity, which has made the sacrifice of Christ its distinctive principle of thought, makes the same sacrifice its rule of life. It does not pretend that it is easy to follow Christ, or that the Cross is light to carry, but rather teaches that the Christian must be prepared upon occasion to pluck out the right eye and cut off the right hand, to hate father and mother, to sell all that he has, to part from all whom he loves, to do work which he dis-

likes, to associate with unattractive people, to deny himself in heart and life, in his reason also and in his affections, even as Christ Himself did, and for the same cause: the love of God and the love of man. So the Church comes to carry the print of the nails upon her hands and her feet, and the world knows that she is the Body of Christ.

And by His wounds Christ assures the Church of victory. Art has been the devout handmaid of faith, but art once did faith an injury when she accustomed the Christian mind to the sight of Christ upon the crucifix —emaciated, worn out, bleeding,

dying. He did suffer and He did die, but His physical passion ceased with His death, and when He rose from the dead His wounds remained, but they were healed never again to open; they continued in sign upon His body, but they were the signs of His power. The truest Christ is that of an ancient gem, wherein the Lord alive for evermore rests on His Cross as one upon a throne, crucified, yet risen, once suffering, now glorified; or in that fine conception of Burne-Jones's, wherein a young and beautiful Christ is set with outstretched arms upon the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, while the human race is represented by Adam and

Eve, who stand on either side. This is the Christ of the Resurrection Day and of the Christian faith. His Passion now is not the evidence of defeat, but is the pledge of victory, for behold if He died, a sacrifice for our sins, by His rising again He has been accepted of God. If he humbled Himself unto the death of the Cross, He has obtained a name which is above every name. For His Church He died, and with Him the Church is living; for His Church He rose, and with Him the Church also rises; for the Church He reigns, and with Him the Church also reigns. There is no power in heaven or earth like unto the Cross, for it

has beaten down sin and established righteousness; it has given Christ His crown in heaven and on earth the hearts of men, and unto every one who bears in him the marks of the Lord Jesus the Cross is the pledge of everlasting life. When Christ showed unto His disciples on the evening of Easter Day the marks on His hands and feet, He declared Himself the Son of God and the Lord of Glory, and they who are willing to have the same marks printed upon them become partakers of His victorious immortality.

The Lord's Brother

VI

THE LORD'S BROTHER

Among the trials of Jesus there is one which we often forget and whose keenness we have never appreciated, and that is the tragedy of His home life. It is natural that we should set a special value upon the judgment of those with whom we live and who are bound to us by the most intimate ties. If they believe in us it matters little that the outer world disbelieves; what does it know? If they condemn us,

can the outer world justify us? do not they know best? Would not Christ's joy in the faith of Peter the fisherman and Nicodemus the Pharisee, and Mary of Bethany, the Saint, and that Roman Centurion of Capernaum, be shadowed by the remembrance that His brother James was an unbeliever? Would not the hostility of the Pharisees, and the persecution of the priests, and the injustice of the Romans, and the rejection of the people have been more easily borne if their enmity had not been sanctioned by the unbelief of His brother? What a stumbling-block it must have been to Jesus' friends, and what a handle to His enemies,

that a man who had known Him from childhood, and had seen His private life, refused to accept His claim or to become His follower. Possibly the cruelest moment in Jesus' life, except the agony in Gethsemane, was that scene in Galilee when the Master was at the height of His popularity, and James came down from Nazareth bringing with him, alas! the Virgin herself, and they proposed to take Jesus away and seclude Him for His own sake and theirs at home, as one who had lost control of Himself, and was bringing a scandal upon the family. It was then that Jesus, profoundly wounded, declared that the ties were closer between Him and

His disciples than with His own house. 'Who is My mother?' He cried in hearing of the people, 'or My brethren? Behold,' He said, looking round on the little company of His friends, 'Behold My mother and My brethren, for whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother and My sister, and My mother.'

No unkindness or disloyalty could chill the heart of Jesus or break those bonds with James which might not be of blood (for James was almost certainly the son of Joseph by a former wife,) but were those at least of home. Jesus did not despair of His brother's conversion and could not endure that James should be

finally impenitent. What had not been done before His death would be accomplished by His resurrection, and if James had once put Him to shame by that visit in Galilee, He also would visit James and fill him with joy for ever. And so the Lord 'was seen of James.'

Nearness to goodness may not always convert. We are accustomed to pity those who through the moral poverty of their homes have to go abroad and depend upon a distant view of goodness; we envy those who live at home with goodness and see it incarnate in a husband or a wife, a child or a brother. Such fortunate people

hardly need a Gospel, for it has been acted before their eyes, and they have been drawn, before they knew, into the Kingdom of God. No preacher we say is like a godly father, and none has done so great a work as a Christian mother. But if it should come to pass that the goodness which has so affected the outer world leaves those within its circle untouched and unredeemed, then are we apt to suspect its reality, or at least to conclude that it has had some serious flaw. Is there not a flaw in our own reasoning, and is not our axiom a fallacy? Do we appreciate a picture best with our face to the canvas? have we not to stand at a

distance and at a certain angle before we catch its beauty? Do the people who live at the base of a famous mountain realise its grandeur? are they not rather overshadowed by its greatness? Is it not a disability of our human nature to grow accustomed to moral excellence, when we see it from morning till night amid all the petty details and repeated commonplaces of daily life? Has it not required death to reveal to many a man, and he not a bad man, the Christ-like goodness with which he lived for a generation, so that when it was removed from him he did homage with tears of vain regret to that which he might have seen by his side?

James had lived in the same house at first, and afterwards near by in the same little village, with the young child whom Simeon blessed, and the shepherds worshipped, with the lad who asked questions of the doctors, and who was obedient to His parents, with the young man whom John Baptist recognised as the Lamb of God, and St. John the Divine accepted as his Lord; and instead of being convinced and won, so that Jesus could find His first disciple within His own family, all the world knew that, whoever believed in our Lord, James His brother did not. Ought not this unbelief of James to be some comfort to good peo-

ple who are distressed because their children are not religious, and who are inclined in their modesty to blame themselves, for who is so faultless as the Lord, who so determined in his unbelief as James? Ought not this painful incident of Jesus' private life teach us charity and hinder us from censuring without better reason public servants of God, because they have converted strangers to Christ, but have not yet brought their own family to His feet? It does not follow they have been careless of their own, or that they are actors before the public, for neither did James His brother believe in the Lord.

Prejudice may blind the soul worse than evil living. We may be provoked to do injustice to James, and it is therefore good to remind ourselves that James was not an immoral man who had an ill will to Jesus and hardened himself because the goodness of his brother was his own rebuke and condemnation. As one learns from his after life, wherein he earned the title of 'The Just,' the Lord's brother was a man of austere character and belonged to the strictest sect of the Jews. His temperament did not make him the easier but the harder subject for the grace of Jesus, since the deepest cleavage in a family is not made by faults but

by creed, so that two sisters in the same family will be further apart if they belong to different parties in one Church than if one were a saint and the other were a child of pleasure, and a pious woman will sometimes be more agreeable to her husband if he be a thorough-going man of the world than if he be religious and belong to another Church. No one would have done more generous homage to Jesus' goodness than James if He had belonged to his own sect, and especially if Jesus had not taken up His public position. James was waiting for the Messiah of God and had settled in his own mind what like the Messiah would

be, and when a Messiah of this appearance declared Himself He would find in James a loyal servant. What filled the soul of this clean-living and righteous man with horror was the amazing claim of his younger brother. That Jesus whom he had taken care of as a child, whom he had taught to saw and plane, whom he had eaten and drunk with in their little home, and who had lived for thirty years a quiet, God-fearing life, should announce Himself in His own village synagogue as the Messiah of the Prophets, and allow people to treat Him as the Promised One throughout Galilee, was to James a blasphemy and a scandal. It

was not possible for him to reason about this madness. If he had had his way it would have been brought to an end by force for the sake of the family, and for Jesus' sake, and it was this thick veil of Jewish dogma which hid the glory of our Lord from His brother James.

Our duty to the public does not absolve us from our duty to our own home. Jesus did not die upon the Cross nor rise from the dead as a private person, but as the head of the human race and the Saviour of the world. Before Him lay, after His resurrection, the chief work of the ages, to reap the fruits of His victory,

and to redeem the Church which God had given to Him, and for which He had shed His blood. Private ties of blood and of home which He had faithfully observed in His past life were loosed as He entered on His heavenly and eternal service, so that the dearest friends of the past must now think of Him, not as the man whom they had known in the intimacy of human fellowship, but as the Son of God and their Redeemer. Yet He could not close that past nor begin the service of intercession within the heavenly places till that man (and with him, we gather, His other brethren) who was the son of Joseph, and had lived a godly

life according to his light in Nazareth, had seen His salvation. It were not becoming that Joseph's son and His kinsman should be among the unbelieving and unsaved, and Jesus, who had taken the burden from Peter's conscience and enlightened the darkness of Cleopas, met alone with James and at last won the heart and mind of that honest, obstinate man. The anxious solicitude of Jesus for His brother's salvation and the private efforts which He made are a rebuke unto those who are ever preaching charity abroad, but whose evil temper is a scourge at home; who are telling poor people how to make their houses clean and fair, but who care not

for the comfort of their own homes; and, above all, those who, whether pastors or teachers or witnesses in any shape to the Gospel of Jesus, are inviting strangers to the Great Feast of God, but have not yet pleaded with their own family that they should come, as Jesus did with His brother James.

An honest bigot makes a good servant. James refused to believe in his brother Jesus as the Messiah, because there seemed no sufficient evidence for so august and awful a claim, and the death of Jesus upon the Cross, while it no doubt grieved James, would only confirm his

unbelief. Nothing, as the Lord knew, would change this stubborn and simple-minded man except an irresistible proof, but if that were given it would be at once accepted, and Jesus dealt with His brother as afterwards He was to deal with Saul at Tarsus. He let the light of the resurrection fall upon His life and death. James had considered Jesus, not to be an impostor possibly, as the Jews did, but rather a self-deluded man, carried away by enthusiasm —the victim of an ill-balanced mind, and he had been obliged to accept the lamentable tragedy of Calvary as the natural issue of Jesus' action. It would be

according to James the judgment of God as well as the judgment of man, and he could only leave Jesus to the pity of the Almighty. If God raised Jesus from the dead after an open and marvellous fashion, then he would have to reverse his conclusion, for the man whom God treated after this fashion must be the Messiah, sealed with the approval and acquitted in the judgment of the Eternal. When the Lord appeared to James, showing to him also His hands and His feet, and expounding to him all that the Scriptures had said about the Messiah, James would pass at once without hesitation and without reserve from unbelief to faith.

With him there never could be any indifference or lukewarmness, and as once he denied his brother in spite of family affection and pride, now he would own and serve Him in spite of his fellow-countrymen and the whole world. It is the man of conviction who deserves our respect and is worth the winning: the elder brother converted will be more than twenty prodigals returned. James, who had openly disbelieved in his brother, came at last to write himself with proud humility, 'a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,' and to appeal to his fellow Christians by the 'faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord

of Glory.' And he who once would have laid hands upon his brother to restrain Him from the work of God, became the valiant chief shepherd of the Church in Jerusalem, and according to ancient history died a martyr for the Lord's sake, praying as he died, 'O Lord God my Father, I beseech Thee forgive them, for they know not what they do!' And the inscription which the Christians placed upon his monument was this—'He hath been a true witness both to Jews and Greeks that Jesus is the Christ.'

Thomas the Doubter

VII

THOMAS THE DOUBTER

THE first disciples of Jesus were for the most part simple-minded and ingenuous men, but there was one of complex nature. The character of Thomas could not be read like the page of an open book, and he was always liable to be misunderstood; he seemed, indeed, a contradiction in qualities, and he was often as two men unto himself. With every one of us the reason and the

heart have occasional conflicts; in this man's nature they sustained an undying feud. In the province of his emotions he was devoted to a single person, whom he loved with all his strength, and in all circumstances, and unto all time; in that person he could see nothing but good; from Him he would not be separated, for Him he would do anything. Upon one side of his nature he was the blind, unquestioning, rejoicing slave of love. Within the province of the intellect Thomas was calm, cold, critical, suspicious of the faith which is swayed by love, refusing to believe that anything is true because he wishes it so,

demanding the strongest evidence for religion, and searching it with severity. Upon the intellectual side he is the type of honest, thorough, relentless criticism.

Thomas may be charged with a certain foolishness of love, who desired to die with Christ, though his death could be of no service; he might be charged with a certain extremity of scepticism, who demanded unreasonable evidence; but there is one charge which never can be brought against this disciple—he was never shallow nor insincere, either in his love or in his doubt. If he loved his Master with the loyalty of a

dumb, unreasoning animal, he loved Him all the more when his Master was dead; and if he hesitated to receive Christ's teaching on the unseen world when his Master was with him, he was ten times more cautious when his Master's lips were sealed in death.

During the resurrection days *Thomas outdid himself in scepticism,* and he made three mistakes which show the defects of his particular character. For one thing, he left the company of the apostles and secluded himself in some solitary place, and in so doing he followed the example of Simon Peter, without Peter's excuse. Simon went

apart because he had sinned publicly against his Lord, and was ashamed to look his brethren in the face; Thomas went apart because he had lost his Lord, and would only, as he considered, be saddened by the sight of his friends. With the penitent apostle one has deep sympathy, and one cannot blame him. If a Christian has denied the Lord before men, and cast a stumbling-block in the path of his brethren, it would be effrontery for him to show himself as if nothing had happened, and by his presence to force that sin upon their notice. It is becoming that one who has so fallen should walk very softly and hide himself for a

little in a secret place, where he may lay his contrite heart at the feet of his Saviour. When he has made his peace with the Lord, then let him rejoin his brethren and make his peace with them, and he is fortunate who, during his season of penitence, has some John to keep him company.

But when a man's love is stronger than ever, so that he would rather have died than denied his Lord, and when it is his faith which has failed, so that he can no longer believe in the Lord, whom yet he loves, then his wisdom is to shun solitude and keep himself ever in the fellowship of his brethren. This man is not a deserter who can

only come back to his place with the amnesty of his captain; he is a gallant soldier who has been grievously wounded and requires the care of his fellows. Let him rejoin the colours, though it be on his hands and feet through loss of blood, and the whole regiment will bid him welcome and take him into its charge; for the regiment is proud of the man who falls fighting, and the deeper the wound the more it honours him.

The poorest company for a sceptic like Thomas was himself, and the worst of all remedies was loneliness. Alone he could only brood over his doubts and nurse his fears till it would seem to

him that immortality was a dream and death ended all. Best for him to place himself with those who loved the same Lord, and, even with the feeblest faith, are still waiting for Him.

As one climbs the hillside and leaves the valley beneath, he escapes from the miasma with its dangerous germs, and in proportion as the sceptic associates with believers his soul will drink in faith as through its pores. While isolation may be a condition of recovery for some diseases, it is the aggravation of scepticism, and many honest and mournful victims of this spiritual disease would have been cured long ago, if they had not kept themselves

apart from the body of Christian people. If they were only willing to worship with those who on the Lord's Day celebrate His resurrection, they would find in this buoyant faith one of the evidences which they seek, and might even find that Lord whom they desire.

What Thomas missed by his gloomy spirit and foolish absence! Had he been in the upper room with his brethren, he would have heard the testimony of the faithful women to the Lord's resurrection, and the witness of Peter and John to the empty grave; he would have seen the glad return of Peter, pardoned and restored, and the faces of Cleopas

and his friend when they came back from Emmaus. He would have been one of that fortunate company to whom the Lord revealed Himself on the evening of Easter Day, and to whom He gave their great commission. All those beautiful experiences of the religious life Thomas lost because he separated himself from the gathering of Christ's friends.

Thomas also made the mistake, and for this he deserves to be very much blamed, of refusing the testimony of Christ's disciples. It was nothing to him that Mary Magdalene had seen the Lord, yet surely she knew Him well; or that Peter had had an inter-

view with his Master, with its sacred circumstances; or that Cleopas had beheld the Lord in the breaking of bread; or that a whole company of disciples had heard Him say, 'Peace be unto you.' No doubt they were simple folk, but yet they were honest and affectionate. Perhaps they were not so clever as Thomas, but they could tell Thomas what he did not know.

There is apt to be a flavour of intellectual superiority in the Thomas type of mind, and a certain amount of self-complacency mingles with its sincere regret. 'My dear old mother,' says some modern Thomas, 'had no doubts, and I wish she could have given

to me her simple and unquestioning faith; but there has been a great change since her day; she knew her Bible and her "Pilgrim's Progress," but she had never heard of biblical criticism, nor had she read any science.' And the son allows it to be understood, and indeed is convinced himself, that the reason of his scepticism is the strenuousness of his intellect and the breadth of his reading. He is suffering, he feels, from the defects of his qualities; he is hindered from the obedience of faith by the mastery of his mind. Is he sure that he knows so much, and his mother knew so little about religion, for it is not

literature and science, but religion which is the matter in hand? He tells us that his mother was the finest saint he ever saw, and he does not boast about his own sainthood. Where did she get her patience, her humility, her kindness, her trust? Was it not in fellowship with the risen Lord, and was not her life hid with Christ in God? This was her testimony, and it was proved by her life, by evidence as real and tangible as the facts of science. Why should her testimony not be received in the matter that she knew? Is it not more than likely that she was right, and Christ is risen from the dead? Is it not a limitation

of intellect to refuse her evidence?

And Thomas made a third mistake when he demanded unreasonable evidence of the resurrection. No sooner had the Lord revealed Himself in the upper room than the disciples, with the kindliness of those early days, remembered Thomas, and we can imagine the regret of John that one disciple was missing when Jesus came, and that disciple the man who loved the Lord with all his heart. John's heart would go out in pity from that room, full of light and peace, to the dark and hopeless chamber where Thomas kept company with his unbelief. Their joy would not be

complete until Thomas shared it, and in the true spirit of their Lord they sought out their doubting brother and carried him the good tidings—only to be disappointed.

It seems as if Thomas was afraid that his reason might be conquered by his hope, and so he went to an extremity of precaution. It was not enough for him that the women had seen Christ, and Peter had spoken with Christ, and Christ had walked with two disciples, and that he had given peace to the whole company. Thomas must see Him with his own eyes; and even eyesight would not be enough to convince his mind; he must not only see

Christ's hands, but he must put his finger into the print of the nails; he must not only see Christ's side, but must thrust his hand into the wound. He not only demanded the evidence of the senses, but insisted upon the proof of touch, which is the most material of the senses. If he could not only see and touch, but also handle Christ, then he would believe that Christ had risen, and so he laid down to the horrified disciples his ultimatum, beyond which he could not go, from which he would not recede.

Had this been any other than Thomas, his brethren might well have been angry, for this was the very madness of intellectual

obstinacy; but the form of his condition had its own pathos and showed that his scepticism was shot through with love. One gathers from the minuteness and the repetition of his wrong-headed demand that a fond, sad memory had been dwelling all those weary hours upon the passion of the Master, and that his love had made its home in the wounds of the Lord. He still saw the print of the nails and the spear thrust in His side, and nothing could turn away his affection from this last picture of his Lord. Through that ghastly wound Thomas had gone out into darkness, wounded unto death, and through the

same door only would he come back to life with his living Lord. 'Except I thrust my hand into His side.' It is a fearful request, but for the love which made so much of the Lord's suffering let Thomas be forgiven the scepticism which asks such unspiritual evidence.

Christ outdid Himself in His kindness to Thomas. When Thomas laid down the final condition on which he would believe, he was speaking, although he knew it not, into wiser and kindlier ears than those of his fellow-disciples; and, although Thomas had refused to join himself to the company in the upper

room, he could not prevent the Lord of that company coming to his room. If John bethought himself of Thomas, much more did the Lord; and if the disciples had it in their hearts to visit the solitary, they did not anticipate the Master. The Lord, who found out Peter in his place of retreat, was not unmindful of His other friend, and the moanings of Thomas through the night watches were not unheard of Jesus. We may hide ourselves from the disciples whom we are tempted to despise for their fond simplicity, we cannot hide ourselves from the Master; and when our unbelieving heart, sick of its unbelief, relieves itself in

foolish words, they pass into the heart of Christ.

The disciples left the lodging of Thomas, cast down and disconsolate, because they had no hope now that Thomas would ever believe, and Thomas sat down in his misery to eat out his heart with sorrow. Thomas had done his worst and the disciples had done their best, and it remained the cruelest of situations—a disciple refusing to believe that the Lord had risen, and breaking his heart because he could not believe. The disciples have done what they could, and they have done well; for they have refused to be content without Thomas, and they have

sought him out in their charity, and they have pleaded with him as with a brother, and they have entered into his sufferings. They have deserved well of Thomas and they have deserved well of the Master, and the Master Himself will now deal with Thomas.

Thomas had asked for a sign, and Jesus had no love for signs because He thought that they ministered only to the love of wonder, and because He suspected the spirit which asked for them. When the Pharisees required a sign, He called them an evil and adulterous generation, and through all His ministry He never condescended to work a single miracle in order to win

His enemies to His side. No request was more likely to offend the Lord, or to make Him angry, than this very thing which Thomas asked, and on which he staked his faith. There was, however, a wide difference between the Pharisees crying out for a sign that they might gratify their curiosity and, if possible, put Christ to confusion, and a heart-broken disciple desiring an unquestionable proof that his faith had not been in vain and that his love had not lost his Lord.

Jesus can distinguish between those who hate Him and those who love Him, although they may fall sometimes into the same

error and speak with the same tongue. For an unbeliever, like the Pharisee—shallow, insincere, unloving—Jesus will make no concession; but for a sceptic like Thomas—earnest, loyal, and tender—there is nothing that our Master is not willing to do. What He refused yesterday to another kind of man, He will give to-day to this man; He will not stand upon His dignity, or upon His consistency, with Thomas; the Master will forget everything except that the light has gone out of a brave man's life through despair of love, and that it is in His power to light the lamp again.

We may very well take from

a friend what we would not take from a stranger, and we forget his foolishness because of his affection; for strangers are nothing to us, but friends are few. There was not so much love in the world that Jesus could afford to lose one true heart, not so much honesty of mind that Jesus would scruple about convincing Thomas. What a patient, faithful, hopeless love was his! Was it so that he could not forget 'the print of the nails'?—then he should see them again if he so desired. Was it so that the gaping wound in the Master's side had never departed from before his eyes?—then Thomas shall handle it if it please

him. There is nothing the Lord will not do, that the load may be lifted from off the heart of Thomas and he may know that the wounds of his Friend are for ever healed and that no spear will ever again pierce his risen Lord.

And Thomas in the end outdid himself in faith, so that the kindness of the Lord had its full recompense of reward. If the disciples went back disheartened from the place where Thomas lodged, and reported that their visit had been of no avail, they were wrong, and had not done justice either to Thomas or to themselves, for though he had not been moved by their argu-

ments and had not become partaker of their faith, he was touched by their kindness, and they had conquered his heart. Their faces and their words had brought back the days of pleasant fellowship, and his loneliness grew unendurable. On the next Lord's Day, as the disciples meet in the upper room to comfort one another with the remembrance of the Lord's resurrection, who should come in but Thomas! Be sure he was welcome, and his coming made glad their hearts. And now there remained only one thing to complete their joy, and within every heart there was one prayer that the Lord would come and reveal Himself to them

and to Thomas. Suddenly and mysteriously, as before, Jesus appeared, and when He has saluted the disciples with His word of peace He turns to Thomas. While the apostle refused to meet with his brethren Jesus might be with him, but He was hidden. So soon as Thomas took his place once more among the disciples Jesus revealed Himself. '"Thy finger into the print of the nails," didst thou say, Thomas? It is granted thee, that thou mayest believe. Behold My hand! Reach hither thy finger. "Thy hand into My side," Thomas, didst thou say? This also is granted thee, that thou mayest believe. Behold

My side! Where is thy hand? Thrust it in.' Everything which he had asked was offered him exactly as he asked it, and, strange to say, Thomas refused to avail himself of his Master's kindness. He reached hither no finger, he thrust in no hand, he cast aside his own conditions, and having declared that he would never believe unless he was allowed to handle his Lord's body, when the Lord in His immense condescension offered Himself for the handling, Thomas would not lay a finger upon Him. What need to touch when he had seen and heard? Before him stood his Friend of Galilee, and to be assured that

Jesus was alive was enough to satisfy the heart of Thomas.

He was to know more than that, and his faith was to rise higher than he had ever hoped, for now it appeared that Jesus had not only been risen from the dead while he supposed Him to be lying in the grave, but Jesus had been thinking of him and been with him during those past days. Jesus had heard him declare his unbelief, and had seen the tears of his heart; Jesus had taken note of his exact words, and had repeated them that evening. The Master had not been angry, but more merciful than ever; He had not refused him his bold request, but had offered

him all that he asked. What manner of man was this who could stand unseen in a disciple's room and knew the thought of a disciple's heart! This was more than the Friend of Galilee, and more than any master of mere flesh and blood. To be present everywhere and to feel with every heart, and to have mercy upon the weakest and the saddest—this is divine. And the faith of Thomas, which had descended lower than that of any other disciple, rose highest of them all. He had imagined that if his request were granted and he had verified the wounds of his friend he would kneel at Jesus' feet and cry, 'My Master'; but

now he had passed Friend and Master, and Thomas made the great confession, 'My Lord and my God.'

Blessed was Thomas, who, having seen, believed; more blessed they who without sight are able to believe. Sight may, doubtless, be an aid to faith, as the physical revelation of the Lord helped Thomas, as the bread and wine help us in the Holy Supper, but the supreme and convincing evidence of the risen Lord is our fellowship with Him and His grace towards us. It is His patience, His understanding, His charity, His loving-kindness. Who is this keeping vigil with us through our night

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